

# 012868 - Whitewater River Basin, CA

Contributed by David Van Dorpe  
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## WHITEWATER RIVER BASIN PROJECT

### Executive Summary

The Whitewater River Basin Project is located in Coachella Valley, Riverside County, California. The Whitewater River runs along the cities of Palm Springs, Rancho Mirage, Palm Desert, Thousand Palms, Desert Hot Springs and other communities. The Whitewater River, Coachella Valley's primary stream system, drains approximately 1,600 square miles.

The Whitewater River Flood Control Project will protect existing and, to a larger extent, future residential and commercial properties from flows originating in the San Bernardino Mountains. The original authorized project consisted of four earthen levees in series. The current design would replace the downstream levee with an incised channel.

A September 2000 Environmental Impact Statement concluded that the plan, with mitigation, would have no significant detrimental impact on environmental resources.

### Important Information:

#### Design Phase

Currently, the Corps is conducting detailed design analysis for the purpose of creating plans and specifications to use as a basis for construction.

The Design Agreement was executed Aug 2001. In FY 2005, the team completed a new hydraulic design, Gross Real Estate Appraisal and updated the Total Project Cost Estimate. Because the updated cost estimate exceeded the 902 limit, the team came up with cost saving alternatives and a revised draft design in May 2005. The Project Delivery Team developed several cost saving alternatives to reduce the project cost below the 902 limit, however additional funding is required to perform detailed analysis, to coordinate with US Fish & Wildlife Service and to incorporate the cost saving alternatives into the Intermediate Design Documentation Report. An additional nine to twelve months and \$1.077 Million in federal funds are required to complete the work and execute the Project Cooperation Agreement.

#### Feasibility Study

In 1989 the Los Angeles District was commissioned to do a feasibility study on flood control in the Thousand Palms area of the Whitewater River Basin, some 100 miles east of Los Angeles, near the cities of Palm Desert and Thousand Palms. The study was meant to develop alternatives and recommend practical solutions which would provide protection from floods. (Over the decades, dozens of destructive floods, including one in 1991, have occurred and flooding still poses a threat to the area.)

One point of emphasis in the study: The impact of any project on the habitat of the fringe-toed lizard, and other endangered or threatened species in the area.

The District completed the first phase of the feasibility study in 1992 and determined that federal interest in such a project was limited to the Coachella Valley, north of I-10, in a 28-square-mile area. Most of that area is unincorporated and falls within the jurisdiction of Riverside County.

As the feasibility study progressed, the Corps examined numerous alternative approaches to the flood control project, any one of which would provide enough protection to handle a flood that has only a 1% chance of occurring in any given year (the so-called 100-year flood). Each had advantages and disadvantages—of cost, level of protection, effects on the environment. They ranged in cost from \$27.6 million to \$110.8 million.

Ultimately, District team members picked a plan that would develop a system of levees which would focus on protecting existing concentrated development and nearby undeveloped lands. At a reduced cost of \$27.6 million, the plan would also take into consideration environmental opportunities to improve the viability and longevity of the Coachella Valley Preserve and surrounding habitat. (The estimated nonfederal share of the cost would be \$10.1 million.)

Ever since March 2002, when Corps of Engineers chief Lt. Gen. Bob Flowers spelled out the agency's new seven Environmental Operating Principles, the Los Angeles District has been applying this philosophy and these seven principles to our projects. The District, in fact, has been operating under most of these principles for years. [Click here to see the principles.]

This holds true for the Whitewater River Basin flood control project now being designed for the Thousand Palms area of Riverside County. The Corps' seven principles are founded on striving to achieve environmental sustainability. These principles, said Gen. Flowers, "will guide the Corps in all of its work."

During the eight years that our team members worked on the Whitewater feasibility study, environmental considerations were uppermost in the decision-making process. We considered, for example, 12 other approaches to providing flood control for the area before finally deciding on one that we think would also ensure environmental viability and longevity in the affected habitats.

Specifically, the alternative recommended by the District would still allow sand to be blown by the wind into the Coachella Valley Preserve—an essential element to the continued survival of the threatened fringe-toed lizard and other species. It would also cost less than other alternatives. And its design could include equestrian and hiking trails along its levees.

Since our feasibility study was finished in September 2000, there hasn't been—for various reasons—much movement on the project. We know that many of our longtime stakeholders in the affected areas, as well as many new stakeholders who have recently arrived in the neighborhood—want to see something happen.

We in the Los Angeles District of the Corps are willing and eager to hear your views. We share your concern about the environmental, economic and flood-protection priorities to be included in any project plan that goes forward. We are eager to work with our local sponsor and partner, the Coachella Valley Water District, to make sure that the final product addresses all your concerns.

As Gen. Flowers declared in announcing the seven Environmental Operating Principles: "Environmental sustainability can only be achieved by the combined efforts of federal agencies, tribal, state and local governments, and the private sector—each doing their part backed by the citizens of the world."

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Army Corps of Engineers and the Coachella Valley Water District Will Host Public Meeting to discuss the Whitewater River Basin Thousand Palms Flood Control project.

Los Angeles -- The public is invited to participate in a meeting hosted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Coachella Valley Water District to provide details and solicit public comment on the Whitewater River Basin Thousand Palms Flood Control Project.

The proposed flood control project consists of a system of levees, which focuses on protecting existing concentrated development and nearby undeveloped lands. The plan also takes into consideration environmental opportunities to improve the viability and longevity of the Coachella Valley Preserve and surrounding habitat.

Currently, the Corps is conducting a detailed design analysis for the purpose of creating plans and specifications to use as a basis for construction.

The meeting will begin at 6 p.m., Tuesday, November 12th, at the Della S. Lindley Elementary School, 31495 Robert Road in Thousand Palms, CA. Participants will have the opportunity to learn about community benefits, project status and schedules.

For more information about this project, please call the Public Affairs Office of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Los Angeles District, at (213) 452-3923 or Coachella Valley Water District at (760) 398-2661, Ext. 270.

[FAQs](#)

[Documents](#)

[Chief of Engineer's Report to Congress on the study to reduce future flooding damage in the Whitewater River Basin, Thousand Palms, Riverside County, California \(1.68MB PDF\)](#)

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